

QUT Digital Repository:  
<http://eprints.qut.edu.au/>



This is the author version published as:

Zhong, Wanjuan and Ehrich, Lisa C. (2010) *An exploration of two female principals' leadership in mainland China*. Journal of Educational Administration, 48(2). pp. 241-260.

Copyright 2010 Emerald Group Publishing Ltd

# **An exploration of two female principals' leadership in Mainland China**

Dr Wanjuan Zhong  
Centre for Learning Innovation  
Faculty of Education  
Queensland University of Technology  
Victoria Park Road  
Kelvin Grove QLD 4059  
wanjuanzhong@hotmail.com

\* Associate Professor Lisa Catherine Ehrich  
School of Learning & Professional Studies  
Queensland University of Technology  
Victoria Park Road  
Kelvin Grove QLD 4059  
[l.ehrich@qut.edu.au](mailto:l.ehrich@qut.edu.au)  
ph: 61 7 3138 3038

\* Corresponding author

## **Abstract**

**Purpose:** explore two dimensions of leadership practices (i.e. teaching and learning and sources of power) used by two exemplary principals in Mainland China against a background of education reform and identify how broader contextual factors have shaped these two dimensions of their leadership.

**Design / methodology / approach:** an exploratory case study was used that drew upon semi-structured interviews, observations and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with two principals, six teachers from each of the two schools and a superintendent who was the supervisor of the two principals.

**Findings:** the findings revealed that there were some common elements in both of the leaders' practices but also some subtle differences. Both leaders emphasised teaching and learning. One saw herself as curriculum expert; the other delegated teaching responsibilities. While both used a top down approach, one principal used an adversarial approach and the other a more facilitative approach.

**Research limitations / implications:** The study used a small sample size. It explored the leaders' practices in the light of broader contextual factors rather than personal factors or gender based factors

**Originality / value:** given the limited empirical research conducted on female principals in Mainland China, this qualitative study provides insights into two dimensions of leadership used by two exemplary principals and explains their practices in the light of critical contextual factors such as contemporary and traditional Chinese culture and the school's organisational context

**Keywords:** Mainland China, school principals, women, power utilisation, teaching, case study

**Classification:** Research paper

# **An exploration of two female principals' leadership in Mainland China**

## **Introduction**

The importance of principal leadership for school improvement is evident in the growing body of literature, policy reports, and research which has investigated and continues to investigate school leadership and school effectiveness (Day and Leithwood, 2007). The focus of this paper lies with school principals in Mainland China. While principals in Mainland China have been identified as key players in their schools within policies and broader literature (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985; Huang, 2005), there has been limited understanding about how school principals lead their schools. Indeed, only a very small number of empirical studies have examined the nature and leadership practices of the principalship and even fewer studies have focused on female principals as a specific category of research (Zen, 2004; Zhong, 2004). This exploratory paper, then, aims to make a contribution to the field by examining the leadership practices of two exemplary female principals working in urban primary schools in Mainland China. It responds to a call made by a number of writers (see Germany, 2005; Turner, 2004) for the need to research female leaders from different racial, cultural and class backgrounds as well as women from developing countries (Oplatka, 2006) to determine if their experiences are qualitatively different from other female leaders.

As it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the multi-dimensional aspects of principal leadership, only two dimensions are considered in this paper. These are the two principals' leadership of teaching and learning in the school; and secondly, the way they use their power to influence others and achieve their goals. These dimensions were chosen because leadership of teaching has been identified in policy documents and research in Mainland China (Central Committee of the Chinese

Communist Party, 1985) and elsewhere (Southworth, 2005; Day and Leithwood, 2007) as a core function of the principalship; and power is explored because it has been viewed as a key force in understanding how leadership is enacted (Zand, 1997). In keeping with ideas by Gronn (1999) and Dimmock and Walker (2005), this paper acknowledges that a key shaper of educational leadership is the broader cultural and societal contexts in which it emerges. Given the changing cultural and societal context of Mainland China since the reform and opening up policy in 1978, the authors contend it is significant to understand these two dimensions of leadership. This paper begins with a brief review of the literature on education in Mainland China, its education reforms since the 1980s and related international literature on effective school leadership, learning and teaching, and power in the principalship. It then moves on to discuss the findings and discussion of the study reported in the paper.

## **Education in Mainland China**

China has a long standing tradition of valuing education. This can be traced back to Confucius (441-479 BCE), an important scholar and teacher who drew together many features of traditional Chinese beliefs known as the “Confucian Analects” (Spence, 1990, p. 59). There are three prominent ingredients that constitute Confucianism. The first is considered to be virtue building of individuals and establishing a morally binding state. The second is the notion of social relations that define the roles and mutual obligations between individuals, between individuals and the state, between man and woman, and between the old and the young. The third relates to education. In Chinese history, it was Confucius who first recruited and then educated students regardless of their social status or class position. However, for Confucius, education did not merely mean knowledge or learning; rather it focused on the cultivation of individuals. Furthermore, education was seen to have a political purpose. According to Confucius, people should work and learn diligently in order to cultivate their virtues and to serve the state as officials. Education under Confucianism was an

important means of reinforcing moral social relations and selecting excellent scholars to serve the state, thus leading to the stability of a morally binding united society. Due to the prevalence of Confucianism in Chinese society, education was and continues to be valued highly in China.

### **Education reforms in Mainland China since the 1980s**

Since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, education has been viewed as an important means to transform society and develop a national economy. However, because of different leadership approaches by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) the national ideology of education and official policies regarding education have varied (Cleverley, 1984; Sautman, 1991). Since the leadership of Deng Xiaoping in late 1978, the focus of leadership of the CCP has gradually transferred to economic reconstruction and the role of education in the national economic development of the nation has been highlighted. Since the 1980s, far-ranging education reforms have been launched to echo the economic reforms. Currently, the role of education in promoting sustainable economic growth and social progress has been further emphasised in China in the face of a knowledge- based economy and global competition. China is not alone in taking this view as the impact of globalisation on education reform has been experienced by many countries around the world (Chapman *et al.*, 1999).

In Mainland China, a plethora of education reforms has been introduced since the mid 1980s. Among these reforms have been devolution of administration from central government to regional and local governments, changed governance arrangements in school giving school leaders greater decision-making powers, curriculum change, and a strong focus on improving the quality of education for all students (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985; State Council of PRC, 1999, 2001). Central to many of these education reforms has been the identification of the school principal as the key school officer charged with their implementation in an

effort to bring about qualitative improvements to learning in their schools. For example, in the Principal- or President-Responsibility System (*Xiaozhang fuzezhi*) that was first mooted in 1985 and discussed in the document, *Reform of China's education system (1985)*, school principals have been identified as chief executives who are in charge of the main activities and important decision making in schools. They are accountable for overall school management, including personnel management, financial management, teaching and learning management, and other related activities (Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, 1985). Due to limited educational funds from the central government, school principals are expected to raise money by establishing school enterprises to supplement schooling expenses (Law, 1998). Currently, school principals have been encouraged to build networks with external communities for support and funding. The new curriculum reform initiatives in primary and secondary schools which began in the late 1990s, have placed further demands on them since they are expected to play a crucial role in supervising teaching and learning activities, curriculum development, and offering support to teaching and learning activities (Li, 2005; State Council of PRC, 1999). Moreover, to help teachers to enhance their professional capability so as to better implement curriculum reform initiatives, school principals are also expected to organise teachers to conduct research activities in their school sites (Xu, 2005).

In short, under current education reforms in Mainland China, the roles of school principals have changed. Unlike their roles as *administrative officials* before the education reforms since 1985, currently their roles as *professionals* have been highlighted. The changing role of school principals from *officials* to *professionals* manifests a change of power utilisation for them. Currently school principals are encouraged to use their professional knowledge to influence others rather than wield their position power over others (Qiu, 2005). Furthermore, due to the implementation of the Principal-or President- Responsibility System, school principals are empowered with more authority to manage schools such as managing finance, recruiting and dismissing staff members (Bo, 2005).

## **Effective school principalship**

To review the vast literature and research on the school principalship is beyond the scope of this paper. However, a selected body of works from western and eastern literature is examined. The findings of the International Successful School Principal Project (ISSP), established in 2001, is worthy of consideration. To date it has conducted more than 65 case studies and several thousand survey responses of effective practices of school principals across several countries (including the PRC and Australia) (Gurr, 2008). Based on case studies from eight of these countries (the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Denmark, Sweden, China, Norway and Canada), Day and Leithwood (2007) claim that although the contexts of the eight countries were very different, there were striking similarities in terms of the successful leadership practices of school principals. The differences can be construed in terms of the different political and social contexts in which principals worked, as well as the different leadership approaches they used ranging from *power over* to those that were more democratic and dispersed such as *power with*. The similarities include similar sets of values, aspirations and ways of achieving. For instance, Day and Leithwood (2007) distilled five key themes pertaining to principals' practices which include commitment and personal accountability; a strong moral purpose and ability to manage dilemmas; being other centred and learning centred; making emotional and rational investments; and emphasising the personal and functional. As identified by Day and Leithwood (2007), being learning centred is a key practice of school leaders and this is now considered more fully.

## **Learning and teaching**

School principals are required to have broad understandings about teaching and learning and to exert their leadership revolving around teaching and learning. This emphasis is prominent in some school leadership approaches such as instructional leadership (Hopkins, 2003) and learning-centred leadership (Southworth, 2005). The



terminology of instructional leadership has been prevalent in North America since the 1980s and much research since that time has explored how to improve teaching and learning and the role of school leadership in improving teaching and learning outcomes (Leithwood, Jantzi and Steinbach, 1999). Literature regarding instructional leadership demonstrates that strong instructional leadership is attributed to effective schools and student performance (Eldredge, 2008). As an important force in schools, principals are accountable for exerting instructional leadership in their schools to enhance the learning outcomes of students.

To guide the instructional leadership practices of principals, some researchers have explored the characteristics of instructional leadership (e.g., Edmonds, 1979; Elmore, 2000; Hallinger and Murphy, 1987 cited in Eldredge, 2008). These characteristics of instructional leadership involve principals' specific classroom instructional practices such as spending time in classroom, overseeing implementation of quality instruction, modelling, supervising and evaluating staff, setting high expectation for students and staff. Moreover, principals who practise instructional leadership are also expected to exhibit characteristics like promoting staff professional development, communicating school goals which aim to improve student learning, and creating a collaborative learning climate to enhance the learning of all members in their schools (Eldredge, 2008). Hopkins (2003) synthesises three broad domains of instructional leaders' practices. The first is to define the values and purposes of the school; the second is to manage the program of teaching and curriculum; and the third is to establish the school as a professional learning community. Regardless of the way in which instructional leadership is conducted, its purpose is to improve the capacity of teaching and learning of teachers and other staff.

Based on empirical research on school leadership in practice and insights from relevant literature, Southworth (2005) argues that school leaders can influence teaching and learning in classrooms both directly and indirectly. Commonly, the influence of the leadership of school principals is indirect because they tend not to

teach students directly; they exert their leadership of teaching and learning through others (Gurr, 2008; Southworth, 2005). According to Southworth (2005), learning centred leaders employ three strategies, including modelling, mentoring, and dialogue. Each of these strategies demonstrates that principals are committed to learning and working with staff.

While the findings of the ISSSP have shown that successful leaders are learning centred, much of the research on the leadership practices of female principals has come to the same conclusion. For instance, research studies have shown that female principals tend to have an instructional leadership style as they not only make teaching and learning their priority, but they instruct teachers to help improve students' learning and achievement (see Collard, 2001, 2003; Ozga and Walker, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1995; Turner, 2004; Varley, 2005). Furthermore, they promote and maintain a rich learning climate in the school and demonstrate an ethic of care for students and staff (Kropiewnicki and Shapiro, 2001; Fennell, 1999). The ethic of care tends to be manifested in their involvement with teaching and learning and nurturing others. The next section considers power based strategies used by the leaders.

## **Power in the principalship**

One simple way of understanding power is to see it in terms of “power over” or “power with” (Blase and Anderson, 1995, p.14). *Power over* represents a traditional view of power which means domination, coercion and manipulation, while *power with* is democratic and empowers others (Fennell, 1999). A useful model by Blase and Anderson (1995), drawing upon empirical work by Ball (1987), demonstrates four different types of power based strategies used by principals. These are authoritarian leadership which is viewed as a type of power over approach; democratic or empowering leadership that is akin to power with that operates in an open climate of sharing; and adversarial leadership. While adversarial leadership has some connections to authoritarian leadership, it has “a greater appearance of openness”

(Blase and Anderson, 1995, p.18). Blase and Anderson claim that leaders using this approach tend to be driven by strong moral agendas. The fourth leadership style is described as facilitative. It provides some opportunities for participation and decision making. Blase and Anderson maintain that it “appropriat [es] a discourse of change and participation while engaging in bureaucratic manipulation towards pre-established goals” (p.20). They argue that this approach is not uncommonly used by school leaders as a way of enlisting staffs’ cooperation and commitment to mandated change.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to refer to the growing body of empirical studies that have explored female school leaders’ experiences and demonstrations of power. However, several studies conducted in Western countries since the 1970s (see for example, Carr, 1995; Fennell, 1996; Kropiewnicki and Shapiro, 2001; Shakeshaft, 1987; Turner, 2004; Varley, 2005) have shown that gender is an important determinant of leadership and female leaders tend to share power with staff and use a more democratic approach to leadership than male leaders. Yet, there is also a body of research (see Collard, 2001; Reynolds, 2002) that has shown that leadership is likely to be the result of a multiplicity of factors, not only and not always gender. The next part of the discussion reviews some empirical research from Mainland China that explores the impact of culture and context on power based strategies used by school principals.

To understand the sources of power which principals use in Mainland China under education reform, Bo (2005) distributed over 1200 surveys to teachers and students in secondary schools. Drawing upon the field theory of Pierre Bordieu, Bo identified five types of power including *political power* (i.e. power relating to the implementation of the ideology of the state and the CCP); *administrative power* (i.e. authority to organise and manage school tasks); *economic power* (i.e. capability to access funds and resources in schools); *academic power* (i.e. expertise of teachers or other staff in terms of teaching and learning); and *symbolic power* (i.e. power

associated with an individual person's personality or personal relationships and friendship). His findings revealed that while these five types of power interplay with each other in school contexts, political power still exerts an important influence on school members' behaviours, and this type of power has a strong impact on other types of power. Furthermore he found that the bureaucratic style of administration was seen as dominating school management due to a strict hierarchical structure in Chinese schools where participation of staff and students is limited. Not surprisingly and following the tenets of Confucianism, symbolic power exerted an important role in developing people's power over others.

In another study on the leadership behaviours of primary and secondary schools, Chen (2005) identified five styles of leadership including an arbitrary style of leadership; a benevolently dictatorial style; a bureaucratic style of leadership, which highlights strict school systems; loose management, and a democratic participation style of leadership. He found that the benevolent dictatorial style and bureaucratic style were frequently exhibited by school principals in primary and secondary schools in Mainland China.

A small qualitative study by Wong (2007) focused on the management style of two successful principals in Shanghai. Interviews were conducted with teachers and students and observations were carried out. Wong's study found that (a) although both principals worked in China, their practices were different because of the different organisational contexts in which they worked; (b) both shared similar values and made good use of the system to create opportunity for their schools; and (c) both were "top down" managers who had the final decision-making powers in their schools. Regarding the third finding, Wong indicated this "top down" style is consistent with Chinese culture which is identified as "high power distance", a term used by Hofstede (1991, cited in Wong, 2007). The findings of Wong's (2007) study demonstrate that Chinese culture exerts an influence over the leadership of school principals.

## **Research Design**

In order to capture the richness and thick description of the two females' leadership practices, a qualitative case study research design was used. The following criteria were applied to assist the selection of participating female school principals: female principals who are currently working in urban primary schools in City J (known for its rich history, culture, and outstanding schools); have had more than five years' experience; aged between 30-50; and recognised as being successful. Two female school principals who met the criteria were recommended by a professor working in a research institute in City J and with his assistance the researcher gained their agreement to participate in this study. Through the same channels, the researcher invited one of the superintendents in the educational bureau of the District to participate in the study. Six teachers (three male and three female teachers) working in the school of each female principal were invited also to participate in the research

One of the authors spent two months in each school to develop a case study on each principal that provided insights into her leadership practices. To achieve this, three main data sources were used and these included semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. Three semi-structured interviews were conducted with each of the principals and focused on their early life experiences, their career experiences and their leadership practices and beliefs. These interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews with teachers spanned between 30 – 45 minutes and focused on their perceptions of their principal's leadership. Due to the busy schedule of the superintendent, a face to face interview was not possible and a telephone interview was arranged. The superintendent was asked to comment on the principals' leadership practices and the schools which the principals led. All of the interviewees requested that the interviews not be tape recorded so the researcher took copious notes which were typed up immediately after the interview. To augment the interviews, the researcher observed the daily practices of the female principals and attended many school based activities such as meetings, sports days and school

competitions. Document analysis was also used and documents such as newspaper clippings, school based documents such as newsletters and reports; and information about the community in which the schools were located was accessed.

Data analysis occurred during data collection and following data collection. Each case was dealt with separately and then a cross-case synthesis was conducted. All data were recorded and analysed in Chinese firstly and then translated into English. For each case, interview transcriptions, field notes and documents were closely read and then coded in terms of key constructs (Gall *et al.*, 2007). These constructs were aggregated into broad categories which represented certain meanings. Via a process of “constant comparison” (Gall *et al.*, 2007, p.467), these segments were grouped into themes which explained the leadership construction of each of the principals. After each case was written, a cross-case synthesis (Yin, 2003) was implemented to identify any coordination between the two cases. For confidential reasons, pseudonyms (Qin and Fei) were used for the two female principals and their respective schools (Taiyang Primary School and Yuying Primary School) in this paper.

## **Findings and discussion**

To present the findings about Qin and Fei, a table is listed here. It reveals the profile of each principal, the school organisational context in which she was working, and the findings about her leadership practices in terms of teaching and learning and power utilisation.

(Insert Table 1 here)

### **Teaching and learning**

In order to interpret the work of Qin and Fei in regard to teaching and learning matters, three broad domains of instructional leadership as identified by Hopkins (2003) are used.

### ***Values and purpose of the school***

Both Qin and Fei were instructional leaders in that their leadership was driven by a value of the consistent pursuit of excellent teaching and learning (Hopkins, 2003). Yet, they used different approaches to teaching and learning in the school. Qin's efforts emanated from her strong commitment to teaching and learning grounded in her expert knowledge of teaching. Her approach was akin to a number of studies conducted in western countries (Angulo, 1995; Fennell, 1999) that have shown women as leaders who see themselves as teachers primarily and who love being with children. In contrast, Fei exerted her role as instructional leader by formally building the school vision and articulating it into specific school initiatives. She strove to foster all-round students to serve the development of the nation. At her school, student and teacher outstanding performance, and the excellence of school were strongly emphasised in the school strategic plan. Both principals conveyed shared values about the importance of quality teaching and learning to all staff.

### ***Managing teaching and curriculum***

Both Qin and Fei were managers of the teaching programme and managers of curriculum in their schools. These instructional management tasks encompassed specific supervisory practices such as conducting instructional school conferences, promoting staff professional development, and encouraging critical reflection (Blase and Blase, 2004; Hopkins, 2003), monitoring and assessing teaching and learning outcomes, and facilitating teaching and learning (Hoy and Hoy, 2003). The case study revealed that both principals kept an eye on classrooms; motivated and facilitated teaching and learning; and promoted teachers' professional development.

The two principals in this study maintained consistent and close classroom supervision in their day-to-day leadership practices. As an educational expert and leading figure in her school, Qin directly coached teachers to improve their teaching skills and classroom management capacities. For her, classroom observation was more than collecting judgmental information about teachers' teaching; rather it was a

reciprocal dialogue process between her and teachers which provided an opportunity for staff to gain educative and developmental learning experiences. Conducting effective instructional conferencing is said to be an important activity for teachers' learning (Blase and Blase, 2004). Qin also actively engaged in organizing a variety of staff meetings to discuss teaching, learning and curriculum development. In the meetings, she encouraged teachers to share their self-reflection of teaching and learning and offered constructive suggestions to teachers to improve their teaching capabilities. Through her direct supervision of teaching and learning, Qin conveyed her understanding of effective teaching and learning. These sorts of strategies are said to constitute learning-centred leadership (Southworth, 2005).

Compared with Qin, Fei did not spend as much time as Qin in supervising classroom teaching and learning; she carried out instructional leadership by working closely with senior teacher leaders in her management team who then performed the role of monitoring teachers. As some researchers point out, school principals can exert their leadership in teaching and learning by working with and through others and thus, they exercise an indirect influence on students' learning (e.g., Gurr, 2008; Southworth, 2005; Lambert, 2005).

Apart from classroom observations, Qin and Fei exerted their instructional leadership by motivating teachers and facilitating teaching and learning, both practices that Hoy and Hoy (2003) claim are crucial to improve student achievement. However Qin and Fei approached this in particular ways. Qin preferred to motivate teachers mostly through non-monetary motivation, such as the opportunity for professional advancement or professional development. She also used her broad network with academics and researchers in Mainland China to offer intellectual support for teachers.

Different from Qin's way of motivating, Fei used a number of other strategies. At her school, teaching performance was linked to teachers' professional development



opportunities and to monetary rewards. Teachers who performed well were offered considerable material rewards. To oversee teaching activities and their outcomes, she instituted a number of school monitoring systems supported by an apprentice-like mentoring system to regulate and evaluate teachers' efforts. Similar to Qin's utilisation of networks to promote teaching and learning, Fei also integrated her professional resources with teaching and learning.

### ***Building learning community***

Sheppard (1996) points out that promoting teachers' professional development is the most influential instructional leadership behaviour of leaders and helps towards the building of a learning community. Both Qin and Fei channelled their efforts into improving teaching and learning by encouraging teachers' professional development. In both schools, teachers were extensively involved in conducting action research to improve their teaching outcomes as well as their professional capabilities. In Qin's school, all teachers were involved in an international teaching and learning programme. In Fei's school, teachers were involved in a variety of research inquiries at the national level, district level and school level. Similar to her efforts in supervision of classroom teaching and learning, Fei steered these research initiatives through a systematic research programme management system specifically implemented by levels of related teacher leaders. The findings indicated that both Qin and Fei's instructional practices helped to build a learning community in their schools as learning was embodied in day to day activities and special initiatives.

### **Power utilisation**

Researchers in the school leadership field identify the importance of power in understanding school leadership (Blase and Anderson, 1995; Busher, 2006; Fennell, 1999). The findings of this study echo this view. In fact, the findings of this study revealed that both Qin and Fei did not demonstrate behaviours that fell within authoritarian leadership (Blase and Anderson, 1995) or a power over (Fennell, 1999) approach. Qin and Fei saw themselves as using their influence (Southworth, 1995)

and interpersonal relationships with others (Bo, 2005) as a means of achieving their goals. Furthermore, they used other sources of power such as their individual personality, reputation and knowledge. Of note is that they exhibited a different preference in terms of specific power utilisation. In light of Blase and Anderson's (1995) four leadership approaches, Qin's power utilisation was similar to adversarial leadership while Fei's use of power was more akin to facilitative leadership.

### ***Qin: Adversarial leadership***

Driven by her personal vision of what constitutes a good school, Qin strove to transform a traditional hierarchical school climate into an authentic learning community for students and teachers so that both students and teachers could experience the joy of learning. According to Blase and Anderson (1995), adversarial leaders undertake active change to promote their vision. They tend to be paternalistic and charismatic. It could be said that Qin was both. She was revered by teachers who described her as a *kind mother* and *strict father*.

Critical to an adversarial approach is a strong moral agenda (Blase and Anderson, 1995). This applied to Qin as she held a very strong moral commitment to her vision which she promoted via a power over approach (Blase and Anderson, 1995). However different from the pure form of power over as in authoritarian leadership, she influenced and motivated staff to follow her moral agenda that involved student welfare and betterment. In some respects, adversarial leadership is akin to a benevolently dictatorial style (Lin and Wu, 1999). As Qin was a recognised educational teacher expert, she played a role as a leading figure in supervising the teaching and learning at Taiyang Primary School (TPS). She exerted her strong influence on teachers based on her extensive knowledge of teaching and learning. It was evident that her status as an educational expert was a crucial source of her power. French and Raven (1959) refer to it as "expert power" (cited in Lintner, 2008).

In addition to her strong moral commitment and expert knowledge base, Qin's influence on teachers was gradually built over time and consolidated through her modesty, honest personality and her strong commitment to build a good school. These attributes are said to constitute "referent power" since they relate to personal commitment and personality (French and Raven, 1995, cited in Lintner, 2008).

### ***Fei: Facilitative leadership***

Blase and Anderson (1995) argue that an open transactional approach which results in facilitative leadership depicts leaders who maintain the status quo of the school's organisation, as well as conducting initiatives that need improvement. Fei's overarching goal of leadership was to maintain the school's stability and its existing achievement. Yet, at the same time, she also appeared to advocate change to pursue further excellence at Yuying Primary School (YPS). For her, the position as school principal implied strong accountability to parents, the community and to the broader society of China. To achieve her goals, she mainly employed a facilitative style as she exerted her influence through building a shared school vision and school management system, and delegating some leadership activities to her teacher leaders. Her way of using power was similar to a power through approach which is characterised by working through others to reach desired goals (Fennell, 1999).

As Blase and Anderson (1995) indicate, leaders who utilise a facilitative leadership approach may also use a power over approach when it is warranted. This seemed to apply to Fei as she kept a tight control over most of the school's management activities even though she did not directly participate in the implementation of specific tasks. She used her legitimate position power to build school systems to manage the work of all staff. Her relationship with staff was formal in the sense that it was akin to a "contractual relationship" since articulated rules and clearly expressed guidelines were used to guide staff members' behaviours (Blase and Anderson, 1995, p.16). Fei exerted her power to help her achieve influence among staff. She assigned senior school leaders to work with her as allies. By supporting them and working with

and through them, she conveyed her influence to teachers and other staff.

Similar to Qin, Fei made full use of her knowledge power to exert her influence among teachers. Yet, her knowledge power resided not so much in the field of teaching and learning (like Qin) but was more evident in her work as an effective administrator. She developed her knowledge of educational administration through more than ten years' teaching experience and by her post-graduate studies both in Chinese and overseas universities.

It was apparent that both Fei and Qin did not exercise leadership referred to by Blase and Anderson (1995) as "open transformative style: Democratic/ Empowering leadership" (p.21). In this approach, leaders share power and empower others to contribute democratically to the school's management. This approach can also be described as power with (Fennell, 1999). The findings from the current study do not support the findings of some research on female leaders that has shown that female leaders operate within a "power with model" (Blase and Anderson, 1995, pp.14-15), sharing power, sharing decision making, and encouraging collaboration at all levels (Carr, 1995; Fennell, 1999; Helgesen, 1990; Henderson, 1997; Kropiewnicki and Shapiro, 2001).

Yet the findings of the current study provide strong support for the arguments of researchers in the field of female leadership that suggest that female leaders are not all the same; they differ due to their different cultural background, race and class position (Blackmore, 1999; Collard, 2007, 2001; Helgesen, 1990; Pacis, 2005; Peters, 2003; Reynolds, 2002). That Qin and Fei used more power through and power over (i.e. adversarial leadership) rather than power with needs to be understood within the broader cultural context of China, which is a high power distance country. The broader influence of Chinese traditional culture, the current societal context, and the organisational culture are now explored as a way of trying to interpret their strong focus on teaching and learning and their use of power in leadership.

### **Impact of Chinese traditional culture**

The findings revealed that the leadership practices of Qin and Fei in regard to their emphasis on teaching and learning and the way they used power can be understood by traditional Chinese culture in a number of ways. Firstly, their emphasis on teaching and learning reflected the broad cultural tradition of China where education is valued in the whole society. According to Confucius, education is an important way to cultivate virtues of people and build morally binding social relations (Wong, 2001). Moreover, at an individual person level, education also plays a crucial role in achieving social mobility in the hierarchy (Cheng, 2001). It is because of the significance of education for the state and the individual person, education has been highlighted in Chinese society. Within this cultural context, it is therefore not surprising that educators in this system have to strive to improve teaching and learning. As key leaders of their schools, Qin and Fei inevitably paid a lot of attention to teaching and learning.

Secondly due to an emphasis on virtue building and a morally binding social order in traditional Chinese culture, Chinese education has a preference for moral education and political purpose (Redding, 1990; Wong, 2006). This preference seemed to influence the way Qin and Fei related to staff. They demonstrated a strong ethic of care in their encounters with staff and students. Such an orientation could be attributed to Confucius' contention that people should continue to build their virtues by attending to social relationships.

Thirdly, Chinese traditional culture has also exerted some influence over the leadership of Qin and Fei in terms of power utilisation. Some researchers of Chinese culture have demonstrated that Chinese society under Confucianism exhibited an emphasis of respect for authority in a hierarchical social configuration (e.g., Cheng, 2001; Dimmock and Walker, 2005). In light of Dimmock and Walker's (2005) categories, Chinese society falls into the category of "power-concentrated" which

means power is possessed by a small number of people who hold resources. Dimmock and Walker indicate “high power-concentrated societies tend to accept the unequal distribution of power” (p.30). Thus, influenced by this power orientation, both Qin and Fei maintained control over the staff in their schools.

Qin’s preference was to take an adversarial approach where she tightly controlled all the management and leadership in her school like a benevolent patriarch. Although Fei delegated some of her leadership in terms of teaching and learning to other staff members, this did not mean that her power was distributed in her school organisation. In fact, Fei still had strong control over the leadership practices in the school. This finding regarding Qin’s and Fei’s approach to power utilisation resonated with the research of Wong (2007) who conducted case studies on two successful school leaders in Shanghai. His study found that the two school principals used a *top-down* style to manage their schools although some consultative processes were used to invite teachers’ participation in decision making. He concluded that this style of management is consistent with Chinese culture.

### **Societal context of Mainland China**

There is little doubt that both Qin and Fei were influenced by the larger social and economic transformations that are moving China towards becoming a knowledge-based global competitive economy. A host of education reforms since the 1980s have pointed to the explicit ways in which school leaders are required to develop a generation of children who can contribute to the nation’s development and enhance the sustainable progress of China’s economy. Education reforms such as new school governance arrangements and developing new modern curricula that go beyond traditional teaching and learning approaches are among these reforms that have had important implications for the work of school principals. In terms of governance, school principals have been afforded new decision making responsibilities in relation to budgeting, hiring and firing staff, and granted autonomy

to establish a management system within their schools to work with staff, and the autonomy to set goals and visions that are in keeping with the flavor of national goals for their respective schools. In this study, Qin and Fei revealed the different ways in which both leaders interpreted the education reform initiatives and how they sought to actively operate their own system of managing their schools.

Apart from the traditional role of education to enable upward mobility for Chinese people, in the current society of Mainland China, education is seen as an important means to add to the competitive capacity of individual people in the market-oriented economic reform era. In the market-oriented economic reform era, instead of the strong control of the state-party over the whole society, free market principles have been adopted in many aspects of the society of Mainland China. Under these circumstances, individual people who used to be tied to the hierarchical and reliable social system in which the state-party took much accountability for the lives of its social members now have to take more responsibility for their own welfare (Guthrie, 2008).

This increasing competition in current Chinese society has contributed to a strong emphasis on education by individuals. Furthermore this emphasis on education by individual people has been exacerbated by the implementation of One Child Policy in Mainland China. To prepare the only child in the Chinese family for a competitive future, parents impose high expectations on the education of their children. This has impacted on the teaching and learning activities of schools. That is, educators in schools are accountable for the learning performance of their students. In particular, principals are required to provide educational programs which meet the expectations that parents have for their children's learning outcomes.

Moreover, the way of using power by Qin and Fei demonstrated the influence of the societal context of Mainland China on them. Under Mao's regime, society was tightly controlled by the representatives of the state, the CCP, through a hierarchical and

reliable social system, which consisted of family, work units or commune, and the state-party. Currently, although this tight control of the CCP has been reduced since the economic reform in 1978, the CCP, as the single ruling party, still holds most control over the society. Moreover, since the long tradition of the hierarchical social system in the Chinese society, current society in Mainland China is still governed by a hierarchical system. Consequently, this kind of governing system influences all of the institutions and people within them. The administration of schools manifests this kind of governing system (Bo, 2005). The finding of this study demonstrated that Qin and Fei acknowledged the influence of political power in the society of Mainland China and both carefully followed the policies of the CCP. Indeed following the political leadership of the CCP is fundamental for school principals in Mainland China (Ministry of Education of PRC, 1991). Consistent with Bo's research findings (2005), Qin and Fei utilised a bureaucratic style of management through which they held strong control of what happened in their schools.

### **Organisational context**

The organisational contexts in which the two principals led their schools also had an impact upon the two leadership dimensions which are the focus of this paper. The organisational context can be understood in terms of the broader education reform initiatives as well as the influence of the wider school community. As indicated earlier in this paper, a spate of education reform initiatives and policy documents have been introduced since the mid 1980s and many of these have underscored the necessity for improving the quality of education via improving the quality of teaching and learning. As an example, two key policies: *Decision on Deepening Education Reform and Holistically Implementing Quality Education* in 1999 and *Decision on the Reform and Development of Basic Education* in 2001 (State Council of PRC, 1999, 2001) have directed that school leaders play an active role in facilitating research in schools to help teachers improve their teaching and learning (Li, 2005). The strong attention to teaching and learning activities (including research activities) in Qin's and



Fei's school reflected the influence of these two policies.

In addition, a strong focus on improving teaching and learning was also influenced by a number of different community factors such as the parents of students who attended the schools and the academics and other experts in the field who had an involvement with the schools. These are now considered. As indicated in Table 1, both Qin's and Fei's schools were located in a district in which the parents of students were well educated and imposed high expectations on students' learning outcomes. As for the specific community in which each school was located, the community of Fei's school was famous for the constellation of parents who held higher degrees. Thus as school principals, both Qin and Fei were required to meet the high demands of these parents for a quality education for their children.

Apart from the influence of parents, it is worth noting that both Qin and Fei had strong external networks comprising academics / researchers, experts, and others whom they called upon to support the learning and professional development of their teachers. Both of them had invited researchers to work in their schools to help teachers improve their practices and both had strong research programmes operating. The emphasis on teachers' involvement of research and improvement are advocated by the academic community in Mainland China (e.g., Qiu, 2005; Xu, 2005).

The way they used their power can also be understood in relation to the organisational contexts in which they were working. Unlike previous times when school principals were viewed as officials in the bureaucratic government system of Mainland China, currently school principals are considered to be professionals (Huang, 2005). As such, they should not wield their power like autocrats, but exercise their leadership through their expert knowledge and skills (Qiu, 2005). The findings of this study revealed that both Qin and Fei acted as professionals. However due to the different organisational contexts. Qin and Fei utilised their power differently. Since Qin's school was a newly built regular school and teachers were not as experienced as those in key primary

schools, she held a tight rein over the work to make sure the school had an excellent performance. As a leading figure in her field, Qin used her personal vision to guide the school development. In contrast, Fei worked through her administrative team to achieve her influence. Perhaps her preference for working in this way might be explained by the large school population (i.e. 5000 students) that pointed to the necessity to work through others to achieve the school goals rather than on her own. In short, both Qin and Fei's employment of power utilisation were consistent with their school organisational contexts.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has presented a snapshot of the leadership dimensions (i.e. teaching and learning, and power utilisation) of two exemplary female school principals in Mainland China. It follows the ideas of a number of scholars (Dimmock and Walker, 2005; Cheng, 1995) who have argued that educational leadership is a “culturally and contextually bounded process” (Dimmock and Walker, 2005, p.3) since societal cultures and specific school contexts shape the types of leadership practices that emerge. For this reason, the broader contextual factors of Chinese traditional culture, current societal culture and the organisational context were used as a way of interpreting the two dimensions of the principals' work.

In the paper, the dimension of teaching and learning was found to be a core component of the two principals' work which was unsurprising given the influence of traditional Chinese culture and recent education reforms that have highlighted the centrality of teaching and learning for school leaders. Of interest to this study was the different way the principals enacted their leadership. Here one principal was recognised as a curriculum expert in her school while the other delegated teaching responsibilities to teacher leaders. Common to both principals were their conviction about the need for excellent teaching in their schools and their promotion of a variety of professional development activities to improve staffs' teaching performance.

Regarding the second dimension, power utilisation, the two principals used primarily a top down style to manage their schools. This finding is consistent with Chinese culture (traditional and current) and supports the work of Chinese researchers (Zhang, 2004; Wong, 2007) who found this approach was evident in the work of school leaders. That the two principals used this type of approach is also consistent with the work of Day and Leithwood (2007) who argue that successful school leaders across the world are likely to use different leadership approaches and these differences need to be understood in the context of the political and social contexts in which principals are working. Furthermore, the findings of this research showed that while the two female leaders were strong instructional leaders, a finding that confirms much previous feminist research, they used a top down approach which tends to be inconsistent with research on female school principals.

There are two important limitations of this study. Firstly, as an exploratory study, it was small in scope and focused on two exemplary principals working in urban schools in Mainland China. Considering that there are over a million principals operating in schools across Mainland China, these findings must be treated with caution. The findings suggest the need for further research (both quantitative and qualitative) that explores the leadership practices of female leaders from different cultural and social backgrounds and from both rural and urban areas to determine some of the other factors that impact upon and shape leadership practice.

Secondly, the paper may have given the impression that the broader cultural context of leadership is the only shaper of leadership practice. This is strictly not the case. While the paper only touched on the professional values of the two principals, it did not explore their personal values or other personal factors from their biographies and careers that shaped their leadership practices. The reason for the omission of considering personal factors was due to word restrictions rather than any acceptance that these factors were not important or influential. The authors of this paper see much merit in both Gronn's (1999) and Day's (2000) work that maintains that the leadership

of individual principals is constructed via a dynamic interactive process in which the personal values of leaders interplay with contextual factors.

## REFERENCES

- Angulo, A. H. (1995), "Differences between male and female principals in terms of demographics, perceived barriers encountered, and strategies used while in pursuit of the principalship", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Nevada, Nevada, Las Vegas.
- Blackmore, J. (1999), *Troubling Women: Feminism, Leadership, and Educational Change*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Blase, J. and Anderson, G. L. (1995), *The Micropolitics of Educational Leadership*, Cassell, London.
- Blase, J. and Blase, J. (2004), *Handbook of Instructional Leadership: How Successful Principals Promote Teaching and Learning*, Corwin Press, California.
- Bo, C. (2005), "An investigation about the power distribution of public secondary schools in China" ("Woguo gongli zhongxue neibu quanli fenpei yanjiu"), unpublished master's thesis, Qūfu Normal University, Qūfu, Shandong, PRC.
- Busher, H. (2006), *Understanding Educational Leadership: People, Power and Culture*, Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Carr, C. S. (1995), "Mexican American female principals: in pursuit of democratic praxis and a legacy of caring", paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the University Council for Educational Administration, Salt Lake City, UT, October 28-30.
- Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (1985), "Reform of China's education system" ("Guanyu Jiaoyu Tizhi Gaige de Jueding"), available at: <http://www.moe.gov.cn/edoas/website18/18/info3318.htm> (accessed 12 April 2006)
- Chapman, J. D., Sackney, L. E. and Aspin, D. N. (1999), "Internationalization in educational administration: policy and practice, theory and research", in Murphy, J. and Louis, K.S. (Eds), *Handbook of Research on Educational Administration*, Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, pp. 73-97.
- Chen, F. (2005), "The improvement of leadership behavior of primary and secondary school principals" ("Jianchi yiren weibei gajin lingdao xingwei:

qiantan zhongxiaoxue xiaozhang lingdao xingwei gaijin”), *Contemporary Education Forum* No.30, pp.30-31.

Cheng, K. (2001), “Changing cultures and schools in the People’s Republic of China: tradition, the market and educational change”, in Lawton, D., Gardner, R. and Cairns, J. (Eds), *Values, Culture and Education*, Kogan Page, London, pp. 242-257.

Cheng, K. (1995), “The neglected dimension: cultural comparison in educational administration”, in Wong, K. and Cheng, K. (Eds), *Educational Leadership and Change: An International Perspective*, Hong Kong University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 87-102.

Cleverley, J. (1984), “Ideology and practice: a decade of change and continuity in contemporary Chinese education”, *Comparative Education*, Vol. 20 No.1, pp.107-116.

Collard, J. L. (Ed.) (2007), *Leadership, Gender and Culture in Education*, McGraw-Hill International (UK) Ltd, Maidenhead.

Collard, J. L. (2001), “Leadership and gender: an Australian perspective”, *Educational Management & Administration*, Vol. 29 No.3, pp. 343-355.

Collard, J. L. (2003), “Principals’ beliefs: the interface of gender and sector”, *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 49 No.1, pp. 37-54.

Day, C. (2000), *Leading Schools in Times of Change*, Open University Press, Buckingham.

Day, C. and Leithwood, K. (Eds) (2007), *Successful Principals Leadership in Times of Change: An International Perspective*, Springer, Toronto.

Dimmock, C. and Walker, A. (2005), *Educational Leadership: Culture and Diversity*, Sage publications, London.

Eldredge, W. (2008), “Elementary principals’ perceptions of instructional leadership and its relationship to student performance”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, Texas.

Fennell, H.-A. (1996), “An exploration of principals’ metaphors for leadership and power”, available at <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detail>

[mini.jsp?\\_nfpb=true&\\_ERICExtSearch\\_SearchValue\\_0=ED399626&ERICExtSearch\\_SearchType\\_0=no&accno=ED399626](http://mini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED399626&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED399626) (accessed 23 April 2006)

- Fennell, H.-A. (1999), "Power in the principalship: four women's experiences", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol.37 No.1, pp. 23-49.
- Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P. and Borg, W. R. (2007), *Educational Research: An Introduction*, Pearson/Allyn & Bacon, Boston.
- Germany, C. D. (2005), "African American women in educational leadership: an examination of their characteristics, attitudes, leadership styles, self-images, and perceptions", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Capella University, Minnesota.
- Gronn, P. (1999), *The Making of Educational Leaders*, Cassell, London.
- Gurr, D. (2008), "Principal leadership: what does it do, what does it look like, and how might it evolve?", *ACEL Monograph*, Vol.42, pp.2-23
- Guthrie, D. (2008), *China and Globalization: The Social, Economic and Political Transformation of Chinese Society*, Taylor & Francis, Hoboken.
- Helgesen, S. (1990), *The Female Advantage: Women's Ways of Leadership*, Doubleday Currency, New York.
- Henderson, L. D. (1997), "Women and power: a qualitative study of leadership experiences and perceptions of female principals in selected school systems in East Tennessee", unpublished doctoral dissertation, The University of Tennessee, Knoxville.
- Hopkins, D. (2003), "Instructional leadership and school improvement", in Harris, A. (Ed.), *Effective Leadership for School Improvement*, RoutledgeFalmer, London, pp.55-71.
- Hoy, A. W. and Hoy, W. K. (2003), *Instructional Leadership: A Learning-centered Guide*, Allyn and Bacon, Boston.
- Huang, W. (2005), "Primary and middle school principal: from the executive post to the managerial profession" ("Zhongxiaoxue xiaozhang: cong xingzheng zhiwu dao guanli zhiye"), *Theory and Practice of Education*, Vol. 25 No.4, pp.19-23.

- Kropiewnicki, M. and Shapiro, J. P. (2001), "Female leadership and the ethic of care: three case studies", paper presented at the Annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Seattle, Washington, April 10-14.
- Lambert, L. (2005), "Constructivist leadership", in Davies, B. (Ed.), *The Essentials of School Leadership*, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 93-109.
- Law, W. (1998), "Education in the People's Republic of China since 1978: emergence of new actors and intensification of conflicts", in Cheng, J. Y. S. (Ed.), *China in the Post-Deng Era*, Chinese University Press, Hong Kong, pp. 559-588.
- Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D. and Steinbach, R. (1999), *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*, Open University Press, Buckingham.
- Li, Y. (2005), "The responsibilities of primary and secondary school principals under curriculum reform" ("Xinkecheng gaige xia zhongxiaoxue xiaozhang de zeren"), *Educational Exploration*, Vol. 63 No.1, pp.21-22.
- Lin, J. and Wu, Z. (1999), "A survey on the communication behaviours between principals and teachers in primary and secondary schools" ("Zhongxiaoxue xiaozhang yu jiaoshi renji goutong xingwei de diaocha"), *Primary and Secondary Management Journal*, No.11, pp. 23-25.
- Lintner, J. D. (2008), "The relationship between perceived teacher empowerment and principal use of power", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Auburn University, Alabama.
- Ministry of Education of PRC (1991), *Qualifications for Principal Candidates and Incumbent Principals in Primary and Secondary Schools (Zhongxiaoxue Xiaozhang Renzhi Zige)*, Beijing, PRC.
- Oplatka, I. (2006), "Women in educational administration within developing countries: towards a new international research agenda", *Journal of Educational Administration*, Vol. 44 No.6, pp.604-624.
- Ozga, J. and Walker, L. (1995), "Women in education management: theory and practice", in Limerick, B and Lingard, B. (Eds), *Gender and Changing Educational Management*, Hodder Headline, Sydney, pp. 35-43.
- Pacis, D. C. (2005), "Asian American females in educational leadership in K--12 public schools", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of San Diego and San Diego State University, CA.
- Peters, A. L. (2003), "A case study of an African-American female principal



participating in an administrative leadership academy”, unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Ohio State University, Ohio.

Qiu, Y. (2005), “Some discussion about how to improve leadership effectiveness of principals in primary and secondary schools” (“Lun woguo zhongxiaoxue xiaozhang lingdao xiaoneng de fahui”), *Journal of Liaoning Administration College*, Vol.7 No.3, pp.92-96.

Redding, S. G. (1990), *The Spirit of Chinese Capitalism*, W. de Gruyter, Berlin.

Reynolds, C. (Ed.) (2002), *Women and School Leadership: International Perspectives*, State University of New York Press, Albany.

Sautman, B. (1991), “Politicization, hyperpoliticization, and depoliticization of Chinese education”, *Comparative Education Review*, Vol.35 No.4, pp.669-689.

Shakeshaft, C. (1987), *Women in Educational Administration*, Sage Publications, Newbury Park.

Shakeshaft, C. (1995), “Gendered leadership styles in educational organizations”, in Limerick, B. and Lingard, B. (Eds), *Gender and Changing Educational Management*, Hodder Headline, Sydney, pp. 12-22.

Sheppard, B. (1996), “Exploring the transformational nature of instructional leadership”, *Journal of Educational Research*, Vol, 42 No.4, pp.325-344.

Southworth, G. (1995), *Looking into Primary Headship: A Research Based Interpretation*, Falmer Press, London.

Southworth, G. (2005), “Learning-centred leadership”, in Davies, B. (Ed.), *The Essentials of School Leadership*, SAGE Publications, London, pp. 75-92.

Spence, J. D. (1990), *The Search for Modern China*, W.W. Norton & Co, New York.

State Council of PRC (1999), “Decision on deepening education reform and holistically implementing Quality Education” (“Guanyu shenhua jiaoyu gaige quanmian shishi sushi jiaoyu de jue ding”), available at <http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/14/info3314.htm> (accessed 12 April 2006)

State Council of PRC (2001), “Decision on the reform and development of basic education” (“Guanyu gaige he fazhan jichu jiaoyu de jue ding”), available at

<http://www.moe.edu.cn/edoas/website18/level3.jsp?tablename=1170&infoid=3313>(accessed 12 April 2006)

- Turner, C. T. (2004), "Voices of four African American and European American female principals and their leadership styles in a recognized urban school district", unpublished doctoral dissertation, Texas A&M University, Texas.
- Varley, S. M. (2005), "Supervisory practices of three female principals in the era of No Child Left Behind", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.
- Wong, K. (2001), "Chinese culture and leadership", *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, Vol. 4 No.4, pp.309-319.
- Wong, K. (2006), "Contextual impact on education management and leadership: a case of Chinese education", *Journal of Educational Change*, Vol. 7 No.1-2, pp.77-89.
- Wong, K. (2007), "Successful principalship in Shanghai: a case study", in Day, C. and Leithwood, K. (Eds), *Successful Principalship Leadership in Times of Change: An International Perspective*, Springer, Toronto, pp139-154.
- Xu, J. (2005), "The role of school principal in curriculum reform of the basic education reform" ("Jichu jiaoyu kecheng gaige beijing xia xiaozhang juese yanjiu"), unpublished master's thesis, Shandong Normal University, Shandong, PRC.
- Yin, R. K. (2003), *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Zen, Y. (2004), "Female principal leadership style: a case study on a female secondary school principal in Guangdong" ("Nüxiaozhang de lingdao fangshi tanjiu: dui guangzhoushi mou putong zhongxue nüxiaozhang de ge'an yanjiu"), unpublished master's thesis, South China Normal University, Guangzhou, PRC.
- Zand, D.E. (1997), *The Leadership Triad: Knowledge, Trust and Power*, Oxford University Press, New York.
- Zhang, J. (2004), "A study of the lives and careers of selected secondary head teachers in rural China", unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK.
- Zhong (2004), "The life stories of three primary principals and their professional

role perception” (“Sanwei xiaoxue nüxiaozhang de shenghuo jingli yu zhiye juese”), unpublished master’s thesis, Beijing Normal University, Beijing, PRC.

**Table 1 Summary of findings about Qin and Fei**

	Qin (pseudonym)	Fei (pseudonym)
Biographical Details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in the 1960s in a Communist cadre family</li> <li>• Excelled at school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Born in the 1960s in a traditionally Chinese family</li> <li>• Excelled at school</li> </ul>
Career	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognised as excellent teacher</li> <li>• Won many teaching awards</li> <li>• 20 years as teacher</li> <li>• 5 years as principal</li> <li>• 3 years in current school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Excellent teaching performance</li> <li>• Studied educational administration abroad</li> <li>• 15 years as teacher</li> <li>• 4 years as principal</li> <li>• 4 years in current school</li> </ul>
Current School	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 800 students</li> <li>• 50 teachers</li> <li>• Located in wealthy residential community</li> <li>• Relatively mid-sized new school</li> <li>• Good school reputation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5000 students</li> <li>• 300 teachers</li> <li>• Located in a community of highly educated residents</li> <li>• Long standing elite school</li> <li>• Excellent school performance results and reputation</li> </ul>
Teaching & Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal vision was to make the school a happy place of learning for children and staff</li> <li>• Personally coached staff</li> <li>• Introduced research program to promote teaching and learning</li> <li>• Created opportunities for teachers to interact with outside experts</li> <li>• Encouraged students' creative thinking</li> <li>• Respectful of teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal vision was to sustain the school's excellent reputation nationally and internationally</li> <li>• Senior leaders coached teachers</li> <li>• Systems to monitor teaching and learning</li> <li>• Strong learning climate for teachers</li> </ul>
Power utilisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Used expert power to influence others</li> <li>• Perceived as a "benevolent parent" by teachers</li> <li>• Strong moral dimension</li> <li>• Skilfully interacted with external contexts to build networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invited staff to participate in school management</li> <li>• Worked through senior leaders in her management team</li> <li>• Utilised a monitoring system</li> <li>• Respectful of school traditions</li> <li>• Strong external networks</li> </ul>